

AFRICAN THEORIES OF DEVELOPMENT AND THE REALITY OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT: *The urge for the development of the African continent immediately after independence pushed the immediate post-colonial African leaders into experimenting different kinds of developmental systems. Some of these leaders copied the Western systems in operation at that time whereas some others adapted and adopted them. The successors of these post-colonial leaders also followed this trend. All these efforts could not bring the desired development as a result of one basic factor – dependence index. It is an existential fact that no country or continent ever developed by majorly depending on others. The key to development is real ‘independence’. Equally true is that no country/continent ever developed without the production of materials and goods. Being a consumer nation or continent is to invariably jettison development. This paper calls for ‘inward looking’ in the developmental efforts of the African continent and minimally look outward.*

KEYWORDS: Africa, Development, Underdevelopment, Leaders.

INTRODUCTION

No doubt that Africa is one of, if not, the most blessed by nature in the comity of continents. The goodness of nature to African is mainly manifested in her rich natural resources which includes the best climatic condition. Despite this free gift of nature to Africa, she is reckoned as the most underdeveloped among all the continents of the world. The main reason for this underdevelopment is not lack of effort to develop but effort in wrong direction.

This paper x-rays some of the developmental attempts of the immediate post colonial African leaders and their successors to see what actually was the clog in the wheel of development. All the developmental efforts of the newly independent African nations could not yield positive results because they were anchored on an erroneous understanding of the African traditional society.

The successors of these premier leaders could not fare better either as a result of the fact that, they believe that African can develop by depending on external allies. Actually, this dependency syndrome is the main cause of African underdevelopment. Hence, this paper makes a clarion call to the current African leaders to seriously look more inwards and less outwards for African development. Majorly depending on external assistance will lead Africa nowhere. External input should be a means of improvement and not the starting point.

The concept of Development

Development is a word that has been defined variously by scholars depending on one’s angle of approach. Martinussen (1997) for example, stated different ways of grasping development which among others include development as economic growth, development as human development, development as modernization process, development as elimination of dependency, development as dialectical transformation and development as history. Further

Gordon (2006) saw development as something that is relational and teleological. In his view, “to be developed implies achieving more than an end that ought to be achieved” (Gordon, 2006, p. 93). What this means is that for development to be in place there must be set targets and achieving beyond these set targets brings about development. Sen (1999) considers development as existence of Freedom. According to him the level and quality of freedom people have determines their level of development. Bamikole (2012) noted along this line of thought that what is important in the contemporary meanings of freedom is that development signifies a qualitative change from one level of human experience to another. Walter Rodney (1972) believed that more often than not, that the term ‘development’ is used in an exclusive economic sense- the justification being that the type of economy is itself an index of other social features. This means that all aspects of development we have in one way or the other has affinity with economy. On the basis of this notion then, Rodney (1972) noted that a society develops economically as its members increase jointly their capacity for dealing with the environment. This capacity for dealing with the environment is dependent on the extent to which they understand the laws of nature(science), on the extent to which they put their understanding into practice by devising tools(technology), and on the manner in which work is organized.

African theories of development

These theories of development came about by way of ideological set up by the middle class Africans that took over the administration of the continent after independence. Actually, at the beginning of the 20th century, there arose movements of ideas of protests against colonialism. These mainly emanated from Black African intellectuals who had either gone to Europe or to America in search of the golden fleece and had come in contact with their Black American and West Indian brethren and had shared their experiences. These movement of ideas came to have a definite character and assumed a philosophic outlook and took different names such as; Pan Africanism, Consciencism, Negritude, African socialism, Arab-Islamic socialism, African Humanism, ‘Kagisano’ scientific socialism and Free market economy.

Pan-Africanism

Mr. M. Blaise Diague and Dr. N.E.B. Du Bois were the first to identify themselves with this movement. These two gentle men were not ‘Africans’ but of African descent. The first meeting of Pan-African congress took place from February 19th to 21st in 1919 in Paris in which a call was made to all Africans both at home and in Diaspora, irrespective of colour, race, sex to unite and decolonize the African continent and enthrone equality, maintenance of human rights, peace, justice and humanness. The proponents of this movement believed that there cannot be any real development in a colonized environment. Hence, the first step forward in establishing real development must be putting in place an enabling environment for it and that enabling environment is decolonization.

Consciencism

The Ghananian Kwame Nkrumah immersed himself so much in this movement believing so much that Africa can never develop unless she is first liberated from the clutches of colonialism. With Ghana’s independence and he emerging as the president decided to articulate his vision for development in the theory of Consciencism and took it as his leadership ideology. Consciencism manifested his socialist ideal named. Wooten (1990) commented on Nkrumah’s consciencism, maintaining that, after Nkrumah’s development and

avid espousal of revolutionary Pan-Africanism and his brilliant discovery and analysis of neo-colonialism, that Nkrumah is also well known for his theoretical treatise, *Consciencism*. According to him Nkrumah saw Philosophical Consciencism as the map in intellectual terms of the disposition of forces which will enable African society to digest the Western and Islamic, and the Euro-Christian elements in Africa, and develop then in such a way that they fit into the African personality. For Nkrumah the African personality is defined by the cluster of humanist principles which underlie the traditional African society. Nkrumah's Philosophical Consciencism was seen by many as the answer to the problem of the three Africas (the traditional indigenous identity, the two others which were imposed from without- the Islamic and Euro-Christian identities) by way of philosophical synthesis.

Actually the underlying mission of Nkrumah in this vision is to awaken the philosophical Conscience of every African person in or outside the African habitat; to bring as many African person as possible to the understanding that the philosophical consciencism which accepts matter as primary reality is the key to total African liberation, Unity and Development; that we must organize ourselves and others. When we achieve this and organize it, African Liberation, Unity and Development will be unstoppable.

African Socialism

Some African scholars have come to think that communitarism and economic solidarity constitute the essence of African traditional life. Many African statesmen have hence, embarked upon expeditions of building up systems based on this cummunitarism, solidarity or socialism which they regarded as ' a deep attitude of the mind'. Despite the various forms and versions the proposed system took in different countries all over the continent, the common denominator was the call for a return to the African traditional life structure, for instance, 'ujamma' in Tanzania.

Some African leaders saw 'African socialism' as an authentic means of achieving the economic, social and political development of the new African States of which decolonization was merely a beginning and offered a challenge to African nationalist leaders to a full responsibility for their new nation States.

The common characteristic in the African version of socialism is what has been described as 'reconstructed traditionalism' or the attempt to claim that modern socialist planning is no more than a redefinition of the communalistic basis of traditional African social organization. African socialism is quite different from others especially the traditional Marxism. It places emphasis on the return to a definite mentality and method. This kind of socialism is communitary, not collective, is democratic not totalitarian; is founded on the primacy of law and not on the dictatorship of class. It is much older than the Western type because it is based on the African traditional communitary life that stretches back to immemorable times.

African Socialism was taken up as a theory of development and leadership ideology by Julius Nyerere of Tanzania. Nyerere's 'African Socialism' could be seen as a development in two phases with the 1967 'Arusha Declaration' as the dividing line between the two periods. Between 1961 and 1967, Nyerere was concerned mostly with the rejection of colonialism on the basis of Leopold Sedar Senghor's philosophy of Negritude and also with shaping and structuring of the new role of leadership into local hands. But it was with the Arusha Declaration that Nyerere started off on a project of shaping out a systematic ideology and articulated policies especially designed for needs and conditions of African countries. Arusha

Declaration offers a systematic set of social values and provides a vision of a different and better future and gives guidelines for its achievement.

In analyzing 'Ujamma' as the basis of African Socialism, Nyerere said that socialism like democracy is an attitude of the mind, a disposition of considering wealth (individual and collective) only in terms of its use for the service of other fellow men. Hence, because African socialism concerns itself with attitude of the mind, socialism has nothing to do with the actual possession of material wealth or not. According to Nyerere, a wealthy man could be socialist if his thinking is for the general welfare of the society while the peasant can possess capitalistic tendencies by thinking how to use wealth for domination and other vices.

For Nyerere (1969:512-513), the point of difference between African Socialism and that of other continents is that the former calls for the return to African values and traditions. In a socialist society, it is the socialist attitude of mind, not the rigid adherence to a standard political pattern which is needed to ensure that people care for each other's welfare. Therefore for Nyerere, in Africa where life has been traditionally socialist, it is only socialism that can be the way of life and a model of development for African countries, for it has been an integral part of their tradition.

Lastly, Nyerere said that 'Ujamma' or 'family hood' is a true description of African socialism. It is opposed to capitalism which seeks to build a happy society on the basis of exploitation of man by man; and it is equally opposed to doctrinaire socialism which seeks to build its happy society on a philosophy of inevitable conflict between man and man.

African Humanism

African Humanism was developed by Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia. Humanism as seen by Kaunda is a means to an end. The end is pure socialism. For Kaunda, man is at the center of everything. This notion is not Western, it is originally African. Damachi (1976) commented on this, thus: "Humanism is supposed to be derived from the traditional African culture..., the African society was progressive and human, and present generation of Zambians must bear this in mind in all its political, economic, social and cultural activities" (p. 7). Kaunda not only sees man as being at the centre of everything but the essence of everything. According to Minogue and Molloy(1974), this notion of man centered African society is beautifully put by asking these essential and soul searching questions:

Why is a house built? Not to give man shelter and security? Why make a chair at all? Why build a factory? Why do you want a state ranch? For what else would there be need to grow food? Why is the fishing industry there? ... the simple and yet difficult answer is MAN. ... We in Zambia intend to keep our society man-centered. For it is in this that what might be described as African civilization is embodied and indeed if modern Africa has anything to contribute to this troubled world, it is in this direction that it should be (p. 103).

Kaunda's conception of humanism has egalitarianism enshrined in it. The equality of man should be maintained in everything despite all accidental inequalities that abound here and there. For him, all people have a moral right to equal opportunities.

Free-Market economy

The developmental theory adopted by Houphouet-Boigny of Ivory Coast. This theory in the actual fact is not African. Houphouet-Boigny who was seriously engaged in cocoa plantation, and thus, a wealthy man before Ivorian independence channeled all his thinking towards amassing material wealth. His idea is not that this wealth should be for all but that all should strive to gather as much as is possible. He abhorred African countries because of their poor economy and believed that nothing economically appealing could come out from them except their poverty. Hence he intended to make Ivory Coast an extension of the Capitalist-Western nations. He vehemently refused to Africanize the Ivorian economy and insisted that the colonial structure of the economy at that stage of development would be disruptive. Houphouet-Boigny then advised his fellow Ivorians to utterly reject the call of Kwame Nkrumah of seeking political kingdom, instead, he told them to search for a life sustaining kingdom based on coffee and cocoa production for these would fetch them a good price and would make them rich.

Kagisano

The developmental ideology of Seretse Khama of Botswana. It is an ideology that teaches people the essence of the four major social virtues of unity, peace, harmony and a sense of community. However, for the actual realization of these, Khama was of the view that certain intrinsic concepts in the Botswana history have to be fulfilled. These concepts included democracy, self-reliance and development. If the people can actually embrace these, then better and fruitful life would be assured. But the major channel towards this is absolute hard work both on the individual and general levels. Hence, the ideology of Kagisano is that of hard work both physical and mental and for the general good.

Arab-Islamic Socialism

The greatest apostle of this developmental theory is Mo'Ammar Gadhafi of Libya. Gadhafi was influenced by his religion in the formation of his ideology. The Islam he based his theory on is Islam in its supposed true nature- the one that is devoid of all fanaticism and in all its divinity. He had great regard for Islam in his theory because according to him it is a religion that gives solutions to all problems both earthly and spiritually, no matter how big or small. Gadhafi's ideology culminated in socialism but the one that cannot be described as African or Western. For Damachi (1976:85) it is socialism at all because it tended to emancipate the society from poverty by providing every citizen with bread and butter and perhaps jam, and by preventing the exploitation of one citizen by another. Gadhafi's kind of socialism is different from others because it accorded private property to individuals but in a limited scale. If, however, there is a misuse, the government can step in to balance the imbalance. Gadhafi (1972) summarized it thus:

our socialism differs from the imperialist and communist versions of social justice. Our socialism is derived from our own heritage and responds to the needs of our society. It serves mankind, gives human being his due importance, protects him from exploitation of class in whatsoever form it may be. Our socialism denies the validity of communism and imperialism. It derives the concept from Islam. It guarantees the right to personal property. It believes in the union of the working class of society without allowing any class to exploit another. It believes in human values and condemns communist denial of religion (p. 30).

The Reality of Underdevelopment

Having seen all these theories of development by some of African leaders immediately after independence, we now ask the salient question, ‘did these theories produce the desired development?’ Of course the honest answer is ‘NO’. The next question is, ‘what went wrong?’ The search for the answer is the crux of this paper, which critically looked into the nature of traditional African society and found the missing link.

African traditional society is erroneously believed to be socialist or communitary in nature. It was and is actually capitalist. However its capitalist style is unlike that of the Western world which is rooted in exploitation thereby breeding conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Africa’s own is anchored on individualism, hard work and resilience. Traditional African society can be socialist or communitary only intermittently, in the presence of a challenging situation. Once the situation is taken care of everything reverts to the original capitalist system.

The immediate post colonial African leaders built their theories of development on this erroneous conception of the African Mind and Society and the consequence is a catastrophic failure in the bid to develop Africa. The successors of this first generation of African leaders did not toe the part of their predecessors in this developmental enterprise. They abandoned everything about socialism whether African or foreign and embraced ‘ free market’ model of development. They generally engaged in buying and selling – selling their natural resources and buying finished and semi-finished products from outside. This kind of practice also can never bring the desired development. Buying and selling can only succeed in killing the developmental spirit in Africa, hence, underdevelopment is still staring at Africa.

For development to be real it must be indigenous, it must come from the people and be based on their environment. Rodney (1972), articulated it very well and maintained that:

a society develops economically as its members increase jointly their capacity for dealing with the environment. This capacity for dealing with the environment is dependent on the extent to which they understand the laws of nature (science), on the extent to which they put their understanding into practice by devising tools (technology), and on the manner in which work is organized (p. 10).

The honest position of Rodney and so many right thinking Africans is that development cannot be imported, it must be internally based and considered. Any external link has to be comparative in nature thereby ensuring advancement. The current and future African leaders should always bear in mind the history of African relationship with the Western world especially Europe. With due respect to and appreciation of the concept of globalization, Africa can never achieve any reasonable development based on dependent approach. Rodney (1972) was very vehement on this by insisting that “African development is possible only on the basis of a radical break with international capitalist system, which has been the principal agency of underdevelopment of Africa over the last five centuries” (p. 7). The line of argument of Rodney tallies with that of so many African theorists who believed that no country or continent will willingly go all out to develop another without seeking her interest which most often is antithetical to that of the supposed poorer one. Development that is indigenous addresses in a better way the peculiar need of that social formation more than an imported one. In the late 1990s, the polytechnic at Calabar, Southern Nigeria, designed and fabricated a cassava processing machine with the intention to take care of the massive

cassava yields in that region. The machine was put to test and it functioned very well. However, the military government of that state then (Cross River state) abandoned that developmental step of that Polytechnic and imported a huge number of cassava processing machines from Korea and when they machines arrived, they were unable to process Nigerian cassava. They were meant for Korean cassava. Thus it became a wasted venture. Therefore, development has to go along with indigenous technology.

CONCLUSION

This work will be concluding by appreciating the honest effort of the first generation of African leaders who were bent on building Africa of their dream from the shackles of slavery and colonialism. Despite the fact of the failure of their theories to develop Africa, they indeed sowed the seed of independence in the minds of future African leaders. The main culprits of African underdevelopment are the immediate past and current leaders of African nations who erroneously think that development will come to Africa by romance with external social formations. We have a history of some developed nations today who developed as a result of independent economic system. Such countries include North Korea and Albania that were considered underdeveloped in the 1950s but today are in the first world ranking. According to Ozoigbo(2011), the developmental stride of the people of the defunct Federal Republic of Biafra remains a model for those who are in need of development. Facing total blockade, the Biafrans were able to fabricate various equipments and tools they used to fight the war of survival. In them the maxim that ‘necessity is the mother of invention’ came to stark reality. Hence, African leaders are called upon to majorly look inwards rather than depending on external answer to African problem. Africa’s relationship with the external world should not be a dependent one but mutual and comparative.

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